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Critics'
THEATRE REVIEWS
1942

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†"Lily of the Valley" opened Monday, January 26th, at the Windsor Theatre.
†"Solitaire" opened Tuesday, January 27th, at the Plymouth Theatre.
†"Hedda Gabler" opened Thursday, January 29th, at the Longacre Theatre.

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"Hedda Gabler"

NEW YORK POST, *January 30, 1942*

Katina Paxinou Stars in Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler" at the Longacre

By WILELLA WALDORF

IBSEN'S "Hedda Gabler" is now over fifty years old, but it still has its moments when an actress of compelling personality plays the title role. In recent times Clare Eames, Emily Stevens, Blanche Yurka, Eva LeGallienne and Alla Nazimova have all had a fling at it hereabout and Miss LeGallienne shocked some of the old-timers by wearing modern clothes and smoking cigarettes throughout the play.

Last night at the Longacre Theatre, Luther Greene staged a new version of the work prepared by Ethel Borden and Mary Cass Canfield, starring Mme. Katina Paxinou, a favorite of the Athenian theatre for some years, and a lady who has also appeared in other capitals of Europe, including London, where she acted, among other things, Ibsen's "Ghosts" in English. According to the program, last night's appearance marked her "American debut in English," which is not strictly true, considering that the present production recently played an engagement in Boston. It was, at any rate, her Broadway debut in English. Some years ago she was seen here as Clytemnestra in a modern Greek version of "Elektra."

Mme. Paxinou speaks in a low, beautiful voice with a marked accent, but her English is generally understandable, and will probably be completely so now that the first-night strain is over. She is a striking looking woman, tall and handsome, with exceedingly dark hair and eyes, and a sinuous, feline quality in her playing that brings out the caged tigress in Hedda's restless, treacherous nature. She wears some highly effective costumes in the sweeping, flowing mode of the period, and when she is roused, her black eyes flash alarmingly. Like so many Continental actresses, she uses her hands a good deal, and is inclined to pose in odd corners of the stage on occasion, looking positively regal.

Some conservative theatregoers brought up on the modern undemonstrative, stiff-upper-lip school of acting will probably complain that Mme. Paxinou is at times unduly melodramatic as Hedda, but Hedda, after all, is a melodramatic figure, with her pistol shooting and her manuscript burning. To make "Hedda Gabler" vital and effective theatre today, the actress who plays Hedda must galvanize the attention of her audience every minute she is on the stage. This Mme. Paxinou does with remarkable success. She is the major excuse, apparently, for bringing up the subject again, and she is a good excuse.

A New Translation

The new translation by Ethel Borden and Mary Cass Canfield, who collaborated on "Anne of England" earlier this season, collapses the play into three acts instead of four, and for the most part avoids the labored and stilted phrasing of so many translations from the old master. On the whole the accent is British. Tesman, in particular, does a great deal of "what-whating," but after all the three men in the company are all well-known English actors and come by it naturally. The play is kept in its original period and no attempt is made to indicate that it isn't just as old-fashioned as it seems. A good idea, too, considering that it is hard to imagine Hedda being quite the sort of woman Ibsen pictures her, were she living today. She would, as a matter of fact, probably be one of those intense creatures who spend immense amounts of time and money being psycho-analyzed, and loving it.

Luther Greene has assembled a generally competent supporting cast for Hedda to render miserable. Ralph Forbes makes a surprisingly convincing Tesman, the obtuse and professorial husband. Cecil Humphreys' Judge Brack is properly suave and insinuating, while Henry Daniell does well with the difficult role of Lovborg. Karen Morley's Mrs. Elvsted is intelligently played, and Margaret Wycherly brings Aunt Juliana to life during her two brief appearances.

Mr. Greene has directed with an eye to showing off Mme. Paxinou as effectively as possible at all times, and he has pointed up the melodrama without making it seem any more ridiculous than most plays of the period are bound to appear these days. Now and then some of the effects are a little overstudied, but after all Mme. Paxinou is well worth looking at. When she starts sweeping around the stage, becostumed and bejeweled, there's life in the old play yet.

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Critics'
THEATRE REVIEWS

"Hedda Gabler"

NEW YORK TIMES, *January 30, 1942*

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Hedda Gabler"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ALTHOUGH Katina Paxinou made her New York debut in English in "Hedda Gabler" at the Longacre last evening, she made her New York debut in 1930. She played Clytemnestra to Mme. Cotopuli's "Elektra" in a performance in Greek, staged on a memorably wet night at the New Yorker Theatre. On the whole, that was not a remarkable occasion. But towards the end of the second act of "Hedda Gabler" and all through the third act last evening, it came back bit by bit to the loosely constructed mind of this theatregoer.

For once the hatred was roused in Ibsen's Hedda, there was something remarkably familiar about Miss Paxinou's darting black eyes, about her hard-drawn face and serpent-like walk across the stage. It was Clytemnestra again, very fiery and vivid, very calculated, possessed of the Norwegian devils instead of the Greek gods. Possibly Miss Paxinou was in the wrong country last evening, but she was on the stage where she belongs, for she has the incandescence of a real actress.

* * *

Let's face it: her English is bad. Although she has previously appeared in London, her accent is still heavily clouded with the language of Athens. But that is likely to bother you most in the first part of the evening when Hedda is in her malevolently langorous mood. Halfway through the evening you are probably used to it. By this time Hedda is dangerously aroused, Miss Paxinou is acting and Ibsen's hag-drama is quite exciting. Miss Paxinou is a striking woman with black hair, regular features and black eyes that are alert and keenly expressive. After she played here in 1930 she returned to Athens and acted many famous roles at the Theatre Royale. Although she is not playing Hedda in the grand manner, she is playing with the scope and vibrancy of a woman who is accustomed to big parts. Obviously, she has a right to them. She has mastered everything about Hedda save the English language, which was not Hedda's language originally.

* * *

Not that Hedda is much more than a star part in these days. Ethel Borden and Mary Cass Canfield have modernized the English agreeably, substituting "Can you imagine that, Hedda!" for the "Fancy that, Hedda!" that has become a part of the theatre's argot. Deprived of his "Fancy that, Hedda!" George Tesman seems to be less of a fool than he used to be. But "Hedda Gabler" cannot be modernized except in diction. Since Ibsen's time a certain five-letter word about women like Hedda has come into common use, and it makes Ibsen's meticulous exposition of her character superfluous.

* * *

Under Luther Greene's rule-of-thumb direction, it is given a good performance inside a large, airy setting by Paul Morrison. As George Tesman, Ralph Forbes is remarkably free of the eccentricities that are common in that part. Although his George is stupid, he is normal—a horrible thought! Henry Daniell plays a haggard, despondent Lovborg, which seems reasonable to this department. As Mrs. Elvsted, Karen Morley of Hollywood, where all girl children are born honey-blonde, is enchantingly modest and womanly. When Hedda starts circling around her, your instinct is to rush up on the stage to protect her. Cecil Humphreys plays Judge Brack in the immaculate good taste of a gentleman who is a scoundrel at heart. As Aunt Julia, Margaret Wycherly gives an affectionate, well-bred performance.

If the purpose of reviving "Hedda Gabler" is to prove that Miss Paxinou is an uncommonly gifted actress, the point is well taken. She is.

'HEDDA GABLER.'

Ibsen's play in a new translation by Ethel Borden and Mary Cass Canfield; directed by Luther Greene; setting by Paul Morrison; revived at the Longacre Theater on January 29, 1942, by Mr. Greene. The cast:

Miss Juliana Tesman	Margaret Wycherly
Berta	Octavia Kenmore
George Tesman	Ralph Forbes
Hedda Tesman	Katina Paxinou
Mrs. Elvsted	Karen Morley
Judge Brack	Cecil Humphreys
Eilert Lovborg	Henry Daniell

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *January 30, 1942*

'Hedda Gabler' Staged at Longacre Theatre

Katina Paxinou, Greek Actress, Portrays Ibsen Heroine on the Dark Side

By JOHN ANDERSON

NOW comes the Greek actress, Katina Paxinou, to play Ibsen's bored, reckless, neurotic lady of the pistols in Luther Greene's production of "Hedda Gabler," which opened at the Longacre last night. Though this is Mme. Paxinou's first appearance in English in New York, she played in her native language here with Mme. Cotopouli in 1930 as Clytemnestra in Von Hofmannstahl's version of "Elektra."

She follows a good many Heddas across the footlights, and takes her place among such dissimilar wielders of the old General's firearms as Mrs. Fiske, Emily Stevens, Clare Eames, Blanche Yurka, Eva LeGalliene, and, of course, Nazimova. Yet in spite of the many and varied impersonations, in spite of the constant revival of the play it still retains a good measure of its fascination, still resists the pigeonhole of the old fashioned, still refuses to become "Arsenal and Old Lace."

The horrible Hedda is always something to see, a remorseless, unflinching study of a woman who never had the courage to face reality and who wrecked several lives rather than live her own. Ibsen's portrait is one of savage intensity and it affords a field day for high tension actresses who wish to shoot the works before shooting themselves, as a cue for Judge Brack's celebrated curtain line, "People don't do such things."

Mme. Paxinou is indisputably an interesting actress, though I must confess to some difficulty in understanding her at times. Now and then the words are blurred, and the emphasis obscured, but she is vivid, powerful and pictorially effective. Her Hedda is on the dark side, rather more deliberately malevolent than most, and suggesting a picture of aggressive evil rather than a woman whose weakness, whose falsity and cowardice result in evil all around her.

Omits Light Colors

There is plenty of justification for this single-tracked interpretation, though to my notion it leaves out the lighter colors of capriciousness and sheer devilment which makes Hedda at times almost as amusing, in a fiendish way, as she is dreadful. I think Ibsen meant these lighter colors, too, when he made Hedda spoiled, cantankerous and mocking along with all the rest.

In any case here she is as violent, vivid and vicious as ever, as bright and shiny as a snake and as deadly. Mme. Paxinou does a thoroughly workmanlike job without hitting any new highs in the part. While there are faint suggestions now and then of Judith Anderson, and here and there a touch of Jane Cowl, Mme. Paxinou gives Hedda a black panther touch that is all her own.

Under Mr. Greene's direction, which shrewdly manipulated the performances around a setting far too big and empty for the play, there are some varied performances. The good, but futile, Tesman is played at last as Ibsen describes him, as a plumpish, bespectacled man of 33, though Ralph Forbes certainly suggests in the performance neither poverty nor scholarship.

Voice Seems Lost

Margaret Wycherly presents Aunt Juliana in a sharply drawn sketch, though her voice, along with the others, seemed lost now and then in the stage spaces. Karen Morley is an attractive Mrs. Elvsted, without quite the forthright strength the part needs, and Cecil Humphreys is a superbly cynical Judge Brack. Henry Daniell's Eilert Lovborg wavered between a pretty good beginning and a pretty bad end.

Ethel Borden and Mary Cass Canfield have made the "translation," and while they have smoothed some of the dialogue into more flexible stage speech they have shorn Tesman of his dryly fatuous "Fancy that," which is virtually a part of the characterization, they have changed the last line for no apparent reason, and they have, finally, nambie-pambied up Judge Brack's brutally clinical report on Lovborg's wounds—a ridiculous change which deprives the play, at its most important point, of Ibsen's jolting ferocity in Hedda's disillusion.

"Hedda Gabler"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *January 30, 1942*

Katina Paxinou Is Seen in a Revival Of 'Hedda Gabler'

"Hedda Gabler," drama by Henrik Ibsen. Revived by Luther Greene at the Longacre Theatre, New York, Jan. 29, 1942.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

ETHEL BORDEN and Mary Cass Canfield, who made the new adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler" shown at the Longacre Theatre last night, waste precious little time on the subtleties and concealed motivations of that malevolent neurotic.

To them Hedda was a thoroughly mean, not to say vicious, young woman, fired by the common vices of jealousy, envy, hatred and a thwarted ambition.

Helped by Katina Paxinou, the Greek actress whose local debut it was, and who apparently is of a similar opinion, they made out a perfect case last night for everybody's resentment of Hedda—including both cast and audience.

We have had our Heddas who have tried to furnish some little excuse in the woman's superficial fascinations for (1) Lovborg's infatuation, (2) Tesman's devotion, and (3) Judge Brack's pursuit.

Tragic Significance

Miss Paxinou played the General's daughter from her entrance to her final exit as a thoroughly unlovely person determinedly bent on divorcing herself from all her contacts.

The Greek actress is mistress of the technique of her profession, and rather inclined to underscore the tragic significance of her heavier scenes.

Her frightening of the distressed Thea Elvsted, her sultry attack upon the mystified Lovborg, her burning of the precious manuscript and her final determination to make way with herself, and thus defiantly hasten the destiny she had felt creeping up on her, were vividly accented.

I have often felt that this was really the most honest, if not the most interestingly mysterious, estimate of Hedda. But I cannot say that it adds to the appeal of the drama.

Beauty and Grace

Nor do I feel that it gives Miss Paxinou a chance to prove her true quality as an actress. If she had made her local debut as Medea or Electra I suspect she would have knocked us for a row of superlatives.

She is a handsome woman, suggesting, with her jet black hair and her graceful carriage, the Mrs. Patrick Campbell who first came to America in 1903.

Her support in this debut is impressive. Starting with Margaret Wycherly, who is a perfect Aunt Juliana it includes Henry Daniell as an excellent Lovborg, Cecil Humphreys as one of the best Judge Bracks to play that role, a fine Mrs. Elvsted in Karen Morley, a colorless but true-to-type Tesman in Ralph Forbes and a homey sort of Berta in Octavia Kenmore.

For Ibsen followers it is worth seeing this "Hedda Gabler" for the privilege of matching this supporting cast with those that have gone before.

There is a fine, fussy set, too, by Paul Morrison, and Luther Greene has simplified the direction to meet the simplification of the Borden-Canfield text.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *January 30, 1942*

Hedda Gabler Revived with Greek Featured

By FRANK FARRELL

The drama editor bats for John Mason Brown, on lecture tour.

THERE are some who hold that Hedda Gabler is a play to be read and not heard, and this group's membership was increased some last night by a percentage of the audience who sat through a revival of Henrik Ibsen's drama at the Longacre Theater. But I do not concur in this opinion. The character portrayal of the cobra-like Hedda is so precise, and the direction of this play generally so blunt that anyone should recognize what goes on, even if Ibsen's lines were spoken in Greek. In fact, they were spoken in Greek last night.

Luther Greene's revival was announced as starring Katina Paxinou, formerly of the Royal Theater in Athens. So far so true. But it also was announced that Miss Paxinou would make her American debut in English. This was a gross exaggeration. There is more Aeschylus and Sophocles in this Hedda Gabler's speech than Yankee Doodle, and more Greek tragedy in Luther Greene's direction than in something by Robinson Jeffers.

* * *

Midway through the first scene I began regretting having attended schools of the Christian Brothers, who stress Latin, instead of Jesuit centers of learning which place greater emphasis on Greek. I actually might have enjoyed Miss Paxinou. Yes, and I might have started a movement in favor of reviving her Clytemnestra in the modern version of Electra, which elders of the theater recall she did so well in her native tongue here 11 years ago. For, Miss Paxinou is one of those intense women, whose silence, whose eyes, whose slightest physical motion onstage are reminiscent of Nazimova, Tallulah Bankhead and Bette Davis.

In the terror department, Hedda Gabler makes Lady Macbeth look like a member of the YWCA. She is a lean, cunning, cruel witch who loves nobody. At least, in this new translation of the Ibsen classic by Mary Cass Canfield and Ethel Borden, she is. For there is no evidence presented to which her nasty streak might be ascribed psychologically. This Hedda is just bluntly and pathologically bad, and the direction she has been given makes her worse—in more ways than one. During most of the performance I felt as if I were observing one of D. W. Griffith's epics of the silent screen which are now vault items in Manhattan's Modern Museum.

She is selfish, conceited, frustrated, a liar and a handsome womanly figure swollen with all the evils ever attributed to her sex one at a time. She is venom in a fascinating bottle, which ultimately poisons everybody in the play and over the footlights.

First she alienates her dull husband's trivial Aunt Juliana. The malice with which she was born is more brilliantly spotlighted with every passing minute onstage. She marries her husband for reasons other than love. She holds the admiring Judge Brack coldly at arm's length only so long as she needs him. She hates Mrs. Elvsted, who reformed Ellert Lovborg, helped him complete his life's work in literature and wrested from Hedda every hope of a return engagement of her love affair with him. She burns his manuscript, leads to his self-destruction, then kills herself. She's quite a gal.

* * *

A talented group holds forth in the ample and authentic, if frigid, setting by Paul Morrison. As Ibsenesque people, Ralph Forbes is a believable George Tesman, a dull, average scholarly husband of the house. Karen Morley plays the sympathetic role of Mrs. Elvsted with grace, beauty and feeling, despite the fact that she is from Hollywood. Cecil Humphreys, as Judge Brack, and Margaret Wycherly, as Aunt Juliana, hold their own with honors. But the Ellert Lovborg of Henry Daniell is a far weaker personality than one would expect to find as the cornerstone of Hedda's horror. His hand-wringing and knee-bending, beyond his pale character, make him appear as a schoolboy anxious to leave the room.

I think America was not ready for Paxinou and this revival of Hedda Gabler.

"Hedda Gabler"

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *January 30, 1942*

Hedda the Horrible

By RICHARD WATTS Jr.

THAT eminent lady monster, the late Mrs. Hedda Tesman, is up to her nasty tricks again, this time with Athenian trimmings. At least, the notorious daughter of General Gabler is impersonated by an actress from the Greek theater named Katina Paxinou, who goes about the business of being neurotic and generally unpleasant amid many a scowl and grimace. The lady from Athens mixes quite a bit of the onetime cinema ogress, Theda Bara, with the defunct Hedda, providing us with a portrait which, to put it mildly, is lacking in subtlety. The Hedda Gabler to be encountered in her impersonation is so evil a villainess that even the simple and unsophisticated George Tesman would soon have got on to her.

• • •

The current edition of "Hedda Gabler" is in a new translation by Ethel Borden and Mary Cass Canfield, who, to bring up their dark past, once had something to do with the writing of a play called "Anne of England." As nearly as I could discover, the chief change that they have made in their version consists of shifting poor George's historic phrase to his wife from "Fancy that, Hedda!" to "Can you imagine, Hedda?" Personally, I found the new remark rather disconcerting, somewhat as if Hamlet suddenly started saying, "To exist or not to exist, that is the query." On the whole, though, their adaptation is satisfactory enough. It is the production that is to blame.

• • •

In the first place, of course, unless the role of Hedda is brilliantly portrayed, this superb study of a pathological woman loses all of its point, and despite every desire to bring about cultural amity and understanding among the United Nations, it cannot be said that Katina Paxinou's performance is a satisfacory one. Hedda is an abominable woman in her selfish, sadistic cruelty, but she is an understandable one in her cowardice, her thwarted sense of artistry, her baffled feeling for beauty, her boredom and her essential ineffectuality. If she is shown merely as a monster, she becomes dull and meaningless. If the qualities that made her monstrous are compassionately revealed she becomes both human and fascinating. It is the misfortune of the current version that she is seen only as a figure of evil.

• • •

The other performances are more satisfactory, but in most cases they are by no means all that they should be. Henry Daniell, one of the best actors in the country, would have made an admirably sardonic Judge Brack, but as the unhappy weakling, Lovborg, he is far from at ease. Cecil Humphreys is a competent Brack, but he misses some of the suggestion of mocking suavity which can make the role so impressive. Miss Karen Morley brings clean-cut honesty to the part of unhappy Mrs. Elvsted, Ralph Forbes is fatuous enough as the pedantic Tesman and Miss Margaret Wycherly is properly in character as the maiden aunt. Under rather routine direction, all of them, however, behave in a desultory fashion, and, without the proper focus and the necessary understanding, "Hedda Gabler" changes from a masterpiece into a dull and ineffective play.

NEW YORK SUN, *January 30, 1942*

'Hedda Gabler,' With Katina Paxinou, Is Revived at the Longacre

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

KATINA PAXINOU, who made her American debut last evening at the Longacre in Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler," is an actress of striking appearance and decisive method, and she makes a fairly exotic Hedda. She is a dark fury come to Norway, picturesquely dangerous among more reasonable folk, and to see her, even in the comparative quiet of the early scenes, is to fear her. It is surprising how aptly this interpretation fits the text.

Hedda, once you go a little below the surface, is among the less comprehensible of Ibsen's characters. You may grant all he says and implies about her—that she is a soured romantic, trapped by circumstance and her own lack of courage in a world of mediocrity; that she is driven half mad by boredom and by the dull recurrence of the ordinary and the ugly; that all her malice and jealous cruelty are motivated by her thwarted search for beauty. And you have thus a description, rather than an explanation, of the woman who burned the manuscript of the man she loved and sent him to his death, and wilted everything she touched.

It has never seemed to me that description is, under the circumstances, quite enough and that as a result the play, for all its brilliance—and theatrically it holds up better than most of Ibsen's—is bizarre rather than penetrating. What Mme. Paxinou's playing does is to intensify the bizarre and this has the unexpected result of bringing the play into better focus. Mme. Paxinou is a Greek and her English is heavily accented. She doesn't, heaven knows, look Norwegian. Her acting method is studied and in the European manner.

And so one abandons the usual effort to explain her in her relation to the other perfectly sensible and understandable characters. She is not like them, and the reason she is not like them is because she is obviously an exotic stranger from another, more violent land. The questions Ibsen never answered are thus convincingly begged. Mr. Ibsen would, I suspect, be astonished to see how Mme. Paxinou thus gets around him. He might also be surprised to hear how the new translation by Ethel Borden and Mary Cass Canfield gets around the verbal stumbling blocks of the authorized version, so that now all the people in the Tesman house speak fluently in American idiom. (A very good thing it is, too, except when now and then the language is too easy for the emotions.)

Aside from the star, the play is admirably cast. Margaret Wycherly takes the role of the aunt out of the routine and Ralph Forbes avoids the usual overemphasis on Tesman's stupidity. Karen Morley is an attractive and touching Mrs. Elvsted and Cecil Humphreys a suave Judge Brack. Henry Daniell fidgeted too much sometimes as Lovborg, but was otherwise excellent. Mme. Paxinou herself is far from a subtle actress and she must be miles from any Hedda Ibsen would have imagined. Her playing is a series of struck attitudes. But so, as far as I am concerned, is the character of Hedda. This makes things come out even, or thereabouts.

It also makes "Hedda Gabler" once more unexpectedly interesting.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
January 30, 1942

A Greek Lady Tackles Ibsen

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

FOR a mature actress, certainly the role of Hedda Gabler is the most challenging, as it can be the most rewarding, in the realistic theater. It is perhaps the one stage character that, for fullness, richness and complexity, compares with the great heroines of modern fiction. The play's stagecraft may seem in spots, as contrived, as it is tidy; its plot may seem, at times, as pat as it is compact. But Hedda herself remains real and fascinating, at once a complete individual and a recurrent type. Bored, frustrated, thin-blooded, neurotic, suspended between two worlds, the dull, tame one she hates and the large, free one she craves but lacks the courage to enter, this woman remains a decadent by-product of all western civilization.

Katina Paxinou, who attempted the role last night, is a tall, handsome woman who for many years was one of the leading actresses of the Greek theater. Physically, she is a compelling stage personality. Simply as an actress, she is always remarkably interesting to watch. Her face and body and gestures are expressive. She is capable of subtle shadings, she can throw out exciting hints of character, she is never afraid of emotion, or of the grand manner. But despite all these assets, she failed last night to provide either a convincing or a consistent Hedda.

The production as a whole is not, to be sure, very helpful. Luther Greene's direction is slow and studied, accentuating what is dated in the play. And Miss Paxinou is handicapped by her accent, which frequently makes her hard to understand. But the real failure must, I think, be ascribed to her acting and her interpretation.

She offers a Hedda who, I take it, is meant to be ever so slightly mad, whose neuroticism is not feverish but frenzied, and whose destructive spirit works less through irresistible impulse than through cunning. A fine performance might have made this interpretation convincing, but Miss Paxinou, acting rather stagily along old-fashioned lines, has only made it seem distorted.

At the same time, her Hedda never builds. She makes too many—and too confusing—small points. She sacrifices the whole by overemphasizing the details, as would a piece of music if it fussed over each phrase. She remains throughout interesting and even sensitive but she is not Hedda.

Ralph Forbes caught some of the fatuous dullness of Tesman, and Cecil Humphreys was his usual suave self as Judge Brack. As Lovborg, Henry Daniell played with admirable restraint but a certain lack of force, and as Mrs. Elvsted, Karen Morley played sympathetically, but without depth.

NEW YORK TIMES, *January 28, 1942*

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Solitaire"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IN "Solitaire," which was acted at the Plymouth last evening, John van Druten has gone straight to the heart of a poignant situation. He is writing about a child who tries to conform to an arbitrary adult world. Edwin Corle wrote it first in the form of a novel. Although Mr. van Druten has not made a perfect play out of it, he has written enough of it with enough compassion to break the heart of a common playgoer; and this column, which has only a limited amount of emotion to leave in the theatre night after night, is glad that "Solitaire" is not a complete and faultless expression.

* * *

For it is a story of Virginia, a nice if somewhat precocious child, who makes the acquaintance of a philosophical tramp in an arroyo, or gully, near her home in Pasadena. Since her parents are modern and scientific, they are not the best of companions for her fanciful childish mind. But Ben, the tramp living in the gully, has the time and patience to listen to everything she says. Although her parents make a pretense of treating her like an adult, Ben does treat her like an adult, for all his responses are normal and spontaneous.

Since the social barriers of modern life make it impossible for Ben and Virginia's parents to meet as equals, Virginia is living in two alien worlds, which she knows instinctively she must keep separate. There comes a time when the Pasadena civic authorities decide to burn the gully and run the tramps out like animals. This is the time when Virginia is almost destroyed with anguish. It shouldn't happen to a dog, to say nothing of a nice child like Virginia.

If Mr. van Druten's craftsmanship is a little fuzzy, his sympathies are uncorrupted, his sentiment is limpid and his literary style is simple. Virginia's first visit with Ben is a little gem of guileless talk and speculation. And the friendship that grows up between them is at once amusing and disarming, for Ben is the gentlest of men, full of wisdom, wonder and true vagrancy. Although life in the gully looks enchanted to Virginia, the poison of the outside world gets into it. A social revolution breaks out down there. Virginia is almost caught in a tornado of hatred, vandalism and intrigue. There are too many aspects of "Solitaire" for adequate treatment in one evening; and, to tell the truth, Mr. van Druten has not fitted them together with triumphant skill. But he has described his two chief characters with enough insight, and poised his central problem sufficiently well, to make "Solitaire" a charming, fresh-spirited little play.

* * *

Every one has conspired to give Virginia as much help as possible. Joe Mielziner has designed two of his best settings in severe and romantic moods, respectively. Serving as director, Dudley Digges has staged a serviceable performance. The part of Virginia, aged 11, is obviously a long one, and a great deal depends upon it. Although Pat Hitchcock is 12, she passes for 11 with no difficulty at all. Pat is the daughter of Alfred Hitchcock, the Hollywood director. She plays Virginia with childish innocence and sincerity, and a loyalty to Ben that is winning.

As for Ben, he is extremely well played by Victor Kilian, who never acted with so much glow and flexibility before he left Broadway for Hollywood. Ben Smith and Sally Bates play the husband and wife, respectively, with decency of feeling. Howard Smith is humorously independent as king of the tramps' gully, and Frederic Tozere does a capital job as the malevolent insurgent.

Edwin Corle's novel has given Mr. van Druten the material for one of his kindest essays in the humanities. Virginia's excursion into the angry adult world is strange, perceptive and moving.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *January 28, 1942*

'Solitaire' Presented at Plymouth Theatre

John Van Druten Dramatizes Novel on Friendship of Child and Tramp

By JOHN ANDERSON

NO ONE can accuse John van Druten of botching Edwin Corle's work in turning the novel called "Solitaire" into a play of the same name but from the looks of things at the Plymouth last night there simply wasn't enough material in the book for substantial drama.

There are stray scenes, to be sure, of disarming humor and pleasant charm; there is the welcome return of Victor Kilian to the stage after seven years in Hollywood; there is the precocious and often endearing playing of little Pat Hitchcock, daughter of the eminent Alfred; there are sets by Mielziner, and the usual opulence of Mr. Wiman's production. But somehow these items do not add up to much of a total in an evening that seems frail and tenuous.

Here again we have the problems of the younger generation in the person of the ten-year-old Virginia who slips away from her well-to-do Pasadena family to climb down the steep path to the arroya bottom to visit Ben, an elderly tramp with such double riches as a heart of gold and a pet rat.

Both book and play make the obvious contrast between the socially safe house at the top and the desperate poverty at the bottom, both suggest the bitter chasm between the haves and the havenots, and both show the stupid and unfeeling smugness of the upper level, and the threat of a resentful Fascism in the lower.

Valid Subjects

These are all good and valid and pertinent subjects but they hover on the fringes of the play and never seem to take quite a full-time part of the drama. Old Ben, simple, lovable and gently wise, and the little girl, warmly affectionate and generous, hold the only focus the play has and even the other characters seem pallid and irrelevant.

The little girl's parents, who object to Ben and all he stands for, are the stuffiest sort of stencils, so wooden that they resist such good actors as Ben Smith and Sally Bates, and the other tramps are not much better.

The only plot action involves the fear of kidnaping or criminal assault and there is a melodramatic scene wherein little Virginia rushes at night to the hobo camp to warn them that the police are going to drive them out and burn their houses down.

Virginia develops a hatred of her own mother because her mother hates the tramps, and finally wise old Ben resolves all little Virginia's fears and wanders off in the pointless solitaire that is his life.

Kind Old Tramp

Since most of it comes down finally to the performance of Mr. Kilian as old Ben, and Miss Hitchcock as the girl, there is this tender human relationship, sweetly innocent and genial. There is rather too much weight thrown upon Miss Hitchcock, but she carries most of it with touching awareness and grace.

As the shaggy, lovable, infinitely kind old tramp, Mr. Kilian gives a warmly enriching performance and the scenes between the two provide by far the best of it. The pace of the performance is rather slow, which is likely to be the case when actors are asked to make much of very little.

Mr. Mielziner's two solid but swiftly changed settings seemed over elaborate and emphasized the emptiness of dramatic content.

Though Mr. Wiman succeeded wonderfully once in such a play about old age and youth in "On Borrowed Time," in this instance the library shelf seems just the place for Mr. Corle's novel.

"Solitaire"

NEW YORK POST, *January 28, 1942*

Pat Hitchcock Makes Her Debut in "Solitaire" at the Plymouth

By WILELLA WALDORF

SO MANY Broadway plays this season are being acted by precocious adolescents that some energetic producer is almost certain to stage "King Lear" or "The Cherry Orchard" pretty soon with a cast of boys and girls under fourteen.

The novelty of youth, however, is definitely beginning to wear off. Last week "All in Favor" opened with a cast full of bouncing young people and one of the town's most dignified critics cried out in print that he thought the kiddie invasion had gone far enough.

Last night, however, a charming little girl named Pat Hitchcock, daughter of the British film director, Alfred Hitchcock, made her local stage debut at the Plymouth Theatre in the leading role of "Solitaire," a pleasant little play stitched together by John van Druten from the novel of the same title by Edwin Corle.

Miss Hitchcock is playing a long part for so short an actress—she must be around eleven or twelve years old—and she is this department's favorite so far in the parade of babes in arms posturing in the Broadway spotlight. Her shrill voice becomes monotonous now and then, and her acting is occasionally mechanical, but most of the time she is a delightful little person playing a persuasive part very nicely indeed. It is depressing to think that in four or five years she will probably have grown up into what is called a Hollywood sweater girl, but at present it is possible to enjoy her beguiling little ways without meditating unduly on the melancholy future.

We have not read Edwin Corle's novel, "Solitaire," which was liked by the book reviewers when it came out in 1940, but we have an idea Mr. van Druten has skimmed off the surface plot, used some of the nicer, more amusing elements of a little girl's friendship with an elderly hobo, a philosopher in his way, and omitted a good deal of what may be described as the sociological aspects of the case.

The first half of his play is delicately turned and gracefully developed, but after the single intermission, hopped up a bit with an injection of lurid melodrama, it becomes fairly commonplace. Perhaps we were asking too much, but the earlier scenes led us to expect something a little more subtle. Nevertheless, as it stands, "Solitaire" is a very pleasant play, and can safely be recommended to almost any theatregoer who enjoys a cheerful, warm-hearted, not too overpoweringly intellectual evening.

'SOLITAIRE'

A play in two acts and eight scenes by John Van Druten; based on a novel of the same title by Edwin Corle; staged by Dudley Digges; settings by Jo Mielziner. Presented at the Plymouth Theatre on January 27, 1942, by Dwight Deere Wiman. The cast:

Celia	Anna Franklin
Virginia Stewart	Pat Hitchcock
Claire Ensley	Joan McSweeney
Mrs. Stewart	Sally Bates
Mr. Stewart	Ben Smith
Ben	Victor Kilian
Gosh	Harry Gresham
Tex	Tony Albert
Heavy	Howard Smith
Dean	Frederic Tozere
First Officer	Blair Davies
Second Officer	Charles George
Third Officer	Robert Gilbert
Ryland	John D. Seymour

As Ben, the engaging bum whose pet rat is so human it has even suffered a nervous breakdown, Victor Kilian is as delightful in his way as little Miss Hitchcock. Together they made an amusing, sometimes very touching, team. Ben Smith as the father who is vice-president of a Pasadena bank, and Sally Bates as the mother who is occasionally overwhelmed with the responsibility of raising a bright and imaginative little girl "scientifically," are capable, and the hobo department is well served by Howard Smith and Frederic Tozere, with Anna Franklin as the colored maid contributing psychic information regarding the mysterious spiriting away of certain foodstuffs from her well-stocked kitchen.

Dudley Digges has directed it all with understanding and sympathy, and Joe Mielziner has designed an elegant California home as one of the backgrounds, and descended into the arroyo nearby to show how the other half lives. "Solitaire" is the sort of play that will set most of its audience fondly recalling poignant moments in its own far-off childhood.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *January 28, 1942*

'Solitaire' a Drama Of Poor Old Tramp And Nice Little Girl

"Solitaire," comedy by John Van Druten from a novel by Edwin Corle. Produced by Dwight Deere Wiman at the Plymouth Theatre, New York, Jan. 27, 1932.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

THOUGH for some not easily explained reason our play producers have gone overboard for the romper and slacks drama this season (what with "Junior Miss," "Best Foot Forward," "Letters to Lucerne" and "All in Favor"), we have not had one like "Solitaire" before.

This John Van Druten adaptation of Edwin Corles novel, shown at the Plymouth last night, goes back almost as far as "Editha's Burglar" for a comparable pattern. It is an escapist drama that escapes everything except the theatre. And the most highly artificial theatre at that.

Good intentions aplenty. Good performances by Patricia Hitchcock, a remarkable child actress of 12, and Victor Kilian, one of the most pursuasive talents among the character actors.

A tenderly moving scene now and then, but manufactured scenes and emotions for the most part, and nothing sufficiently believable to build solid audience interest upon. Which, in this barren season, is more regretable than it would be at another time.

Virginia's Adventure

Little Miss Hitchcock in "Solitaire" plays Virginia, the 10-year-old daughter of a fairly smug bank executive and his wife, living at the edge of an arroya in California.

A highly imaginative child, brought up in the "progressive" schools, Virginia meets an "oakie" which is West Coast for hobo, with a tame rat on a street car and straightway starts building fairy tales around them.

Father and mother have no time to listen to her adventure, so she seeks to follow it up herself. Discovers that her friend and his rat live in a shack at the bottom of the arroya.

Calls upon them; steals food for them; becomes deeply attached to them. Ben, the tramp, is a human sort, slightly touched in the head; a messy but likeable misfit who wouldn't harm a rat, to say nothing of a sweet little girl.

But there are tougher tramps in the arroyo and trouble threatens. The law steps in; Virginia's hysterical parents step in; Ben and the rats are driven out.

Pat's Success

Miss Hitchcock (Pat they call her) carries the burden of the story with a fine confidence and professional poise. Her childish treble is not easy to hear clearly, but she is careful to speak distinctly, and her training serves her splendidly in the difficult expression of her emotional scenes.

Kilian is gentle and tender without ever being maudlin. Sally Bates, back from a stretch on the coast, has a thankless job in the mother role, which she decorates with pictorial effectiveness. Ben Smith is unhappy as a colorless parent.

Frederic Tozere is also villainously cast as a tough organizer among the oakies; Howard Smith, Harry Gresham and Tony Albert get off with lighter and more sympathic tramp roles.

Dwight Deere Wiman has provided generously for the production. Joe Meilsiner has designed two handsome exteriors, one of the arroyo and one of the banker's house. Dudley Digges has done what he could to hold the story together, the child and the tramp scenes being appealingly sympathetic.

There as matinee possibilities in "Solitaire," if it doesn't make the mothers too unhappy.

"Solitaire"

NEW YORK SUN, *January 28, 1942*

'Solitaire,' a Play of Delicate Charm, Is Offered at the Plymouth

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE charm of Edwin Corle's delicately traced story of a little girl and a gentle tramp, first told in a novel called "Solitaire," has been recaptured in John Van Druten's dramatization, which opened under the same title at the Plymouth Theater last evening. On the stage it is a small idyl of innocence, fragile and endearing. It may not go to your head, but it is very apt to go to your heart.

There are melodramatic trimmings, but the essential story is slight. It is the story of Virginia, who lives in a handsome house on a Pasadena hill and is the daughter of a bank vice-president, and of Ben, who lives in a shack in the arroyo below. Ben lives there with a pet rat and it is the rat, first glimpsed as it burrows under Ben's shirt on a street car, which draws her to the arroyo in the beginning. But after that it is Ben, with his understanding of the place inside where you are alone, and his story of Mary Sunshine, the perfect wife who was ahead of her time, and his warm comprehension of little girls, who brings her back and brings her back again.

Virginia rifles the kitchen to feed Ben and the beloved rat and listens with wide eyes to his stories and wide ears to his rambling, captivating philosophy. The two live for a time on a kind of borrowed innocence, unsuspected and unsuspicious. But, of course, it is too good to last. Eden is invaded by a variety of enemies—a "new order" is declared by hobo Fascist; another little girl is killed by a tramp not like Ben; the child's indifferent parents discover their daughter's retreat and are, understandably, fearful and horrified. But it does not end until Virginia runs down through the night to warn Ben of trouble coming, and until melodrama and misunderstanding flare violently. Mr. Van Druten has written a new, and very agreeable, last scene and the idyl ends pleasantly.

It is not really much story for a play and it is not quite as much as Mr. Corle had for a novel. Mr. Van Druten has abandoned the satire which did, in the earlier version, place the parents, so that now they are dreafully underwritten. For less evident reasons he has played down the Fascism of the hobo Dean's revolution in the arroyo and for no reason at all he has played up the maid Celia into a conventional figure of fun. But nothing has been lost that matters, since the essential story remains, and with it the essential charm.

There are only two parts that matter, and both are excellently played. Pat Hitchcock—who may as well be identified as Alfred Hitchcock's daughter—plays Virginia with a little girl's directness and eagerness, and with a good actor's perception. Victor Kilian's playing of Ben has a wise simplicity and a great deal of quiet comedy and just the compassionate understanding the part requires. Ben Smith, Frederic Tozere and the rest have less to work on, but do well enough. Sally Bates is not too successful with the few straws of character the author has negligently tossed in her direction.

Jo Mielziner's settings add to the play's flavor and Dudley Digges's direction heightens it. It is a fine, fresh flavor, like mint.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *January 28, 1942*

Little Rich Girl

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

AMONG the increasingly overwhelming multitude of novels that this inconstant reader never got around to perusing is Edwin Corle's "Solitaire." It was, it appears, a sentimental and mildly philosophical tale of the poor little rich girl and the amiable tramp who understood her. Offhand I would have said that it was not the sort of work that a playwright would particularly long to dramatize but it seems to have fascinated John van Druten, and the fruits of his ministrations are now visible in Dwight Deere Wiman's attractive production. The results are more satisfactory than I would have expected, too. Understandingly staged by Dudley Digges and beautifully played by twelve-year-old Pat Hitchcock, the dramatized "Solitaire" turns out to be a rather agreeable sentimental spree, done with a pleasant minimum of saccharinity.

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In its stage version "Solitaire" tells how a little girl named Virginia Stewart, the child of well meaning but uncomprehending parents, one day came to the assistance of a tramp called Ben, who was being thrown off a streetcar for carrying with him his pet rat. Ben lived in an arroyo near the California home of Virginia's mother and father, and the little girl began paying visits to the one neighbor who was friendly and comprehending. All it seems, was reasonably idyllic until the parents and some ugly minded tramps misunderstood the relationship between the two, and it was not until Virginia had a breakdown after Ben had been taken to jail that the older Stewarts began to understand. That is about all "Solitaire" has to say.

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It happens that a great many of the virtues of the new play are inclined to be negative. It never does get painfully sweet. Its philosophical excursions are modestly unassuming. It never bears down too heavily on its pathos or its sentiment. It is neither fancy nor self-consciously innocent. It doesn't embarrass you by excesses of any sort. On the more positive side, it is simply, straightforwardly and attractively written. Nevertheless, with all of its pleasant and likable qualities, it is a mild and minor essay in playgoing and hardly seems the sort of work that should be of deep concern to one of the ranking playwrights. It is impossible to deny, though, that it is touching and sympathetic and that it is filled with kindliness and an air of unobstrusive sweetness, even if it does also seem slender and given to mildness.

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The brightest feature of the work is the lovely acting of young Miss Hitchcock, daughter of the brilliant film director, Alfred Hitchcock. In a long, difficult and dangerous role, the youthful actress plays with such understanding, honest emotional skill and sweetness of spirit that she gives the drama an added honesty and dignity and offers an entirely irresistible performance. As the tramp, Victor Kilian, who was once so wonderful as a jealous flagpole sitter in a terrible thing called "The Great Magoo," is admirably honest and direct in a portrayal that would be worthy of applause if only for its skill at avoiding the pitfalls of whimsey. The other characters are less important and less well devised, but Miss Sally Bates, Ben Smith, Frederic Tozere and the rest of the cast are of help. So are Joe Mielsiner's excellent sets. "Solitaire" has the virtue of its unashamed appeal to the simpler emotions.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
January 28, 1942

A Little Girl And Her Hobo Pal

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

I GUESS maybe you've played that game where you marry off the most incongruous couple you can think of, like Brenda Frazier and John L. Lewis. Well, somewhat the same sort of union takes place in *Solitaire* between *The Poor Little Rich Girl* and *Of Mice and Men*. With—just to get you all mixed up—*On Borrowed Time* to tie the knot. I wish I could rejoice in the match but I fear I must be a kind of death's-head at the wedding feast. It seems to me a decided misalliance.

Solitaire tells of a lonely little girl whose wealthy parents are fond of her but too busy to give her any of their time. She strikes up a friendship with a nice middle-aged hobo who has camped out with some other bozos at the bottom of a neighboring *arroyo* (let's call it gully) and keeps a tame rat. In the late afternoons the two friends, rat-cage in hand, have some ducky conversations, vaguely philosophical and overpoweringly whimsical, that may warm other people's hearts but don't mine. (It is these idyllic sessions that have the *On Borrowed Time* touch.)

But storm clouds start blowing up. Not all the bozos down the gully are as pure in heart as Ben; they eye little Virginia as jail-bait. Meanwhile her parents get wind of her pastime and, with a nasty child kidnaping in the headlines, get scared out of their wits. They arrange to have the gully smoked out. Late at night Virginia steals down to warn her pal, and at that point melodrama is let loose from all sides. A final scene, however, sweeps out the realism and lets you put on the rose-colored glasses again.

Despite a remarkable début performance by Alfred Hitchcock's 12-year-old daughter, Pat, who is extremely gifted, and a simple and restrained one by Victor Kilian as Ben, *Solitaire* seems to me a rather distasteful, even if a perfectly harmless, play. I don't think the only reason is that it mixes sentimental whimsy with harsh reality. Such a combination might well have produced a rewarding fable of goodness and evil, or a useful drama about the world's haves and have-nots. The trouble with *Solitaire* lies for me, less in the strangeness of the mixture than in the phoniness of the individual ingredients.

Mr. Van Druten has written some pleasant dialogue and effective scenes. But for the most part his play (I haven't read the novel it was adapted from) seems shot with coyness and flavored with cheap vanilla; while its starker side, with its pasteboard villain and lurid climax, seems totally unreal.

Dudley Digges has done a nice job of direction and Jo Mielsiner has designed two nice sets. In minor roles Sally Bates, Howard Smith, Jean McSweeney and Ben Smith supplement the good work of the two principals.

"Solitaire"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *January 28, 1942*

Pat Hitchcock Sparkles in Solitaire, Her Debut

By FRANK FARRELL

The drama editor bats for John Mason Brown, on lecture tours

ALFRED HITCHCOCK, the film director to whom William Boehnel seems to attribute everything worthwhile in motion pictures this side of Thomas Edison's invention, may take another bow from a new set of critics today for 1942's most substantial contribution to the legitimate theater. Mr. Hitchcock's 12-year-old daughter made her stage debut in Solitaire, and so entrancing was her performance last night at the Plymouth that Lloyds probably will be willing to underwrite the family for a six-figure income this year, even if the director of Suspicion, Rebecca, Foreign Correspondent, The Lady Vanishes, etc., fails to earn more than a few pennies.

Miss Hitchcock is prodigious. A loveable roly-poly youngster with a voice scarcely an octave short of an inaudible dog whistle, she assumes the proportions of a Helen Hayes carrying a whole production on her little shoulders. In fact, if it were not for Miss Hitchcock and the admirable teamwork of Victor Killian, her hobo friend in the play, you could wrap up Solitaire and stow it further from sight than that worst Christmas cravat. For Solitaire falls considerably short of par for Playwright John Van Druten.

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It's all about a forward moppet of the precocious progressive school, the daughter of a bank vice-president in Pasadena, Cal., whose beautiful suburban home overlooks an arroyo at the bottom of which dwells a philosophical tramp, her knight in tattered armor.

The garden wall becomes a veil between her parents and this other interest. She feebly tries to acquaint her mother and father with what's happening to her in the first scene, but they are busy discussing some neighbors.

Back and forth the scenes shift, as the careful staging of Dudley Digges develops the physchological aspect of the story whereby the youngster grows more attached to the hobo jungle than her beflowered backyard.

The innocence of the child, raiding the icebox to feed the vagabonds, and the sinister contrast of this group's flakey membership creates a suspense in the second scene that graduates to a frenzy as trouble brews among the hobos and a sex-maniac story breaks in an adjacent hamlet.

But everything comes out even in the summation. Little girls just shouldn't associate with bums, because they may get into trouble and worry the hell out of their parents, Mr. Van Druten teaches us. Even if the gallant old broken-down sage of the highway is a harmless fellow with a fascinating pet rat, it's not right. Because into the jungle may wander an evil, strong-armed terror like Frederic Tozere to organize his flea-bitten brethren under the principles of (sshhh) Nazism and turn on the little girl and her Rotarian antecedents on top of the hill. Isn't it dreadful?

Author Van Druten, who worked out brilliantly the difficult situations and delicate characterizations of Old Acquaintance, rings the bell with a phony tinkle in Solitaire. He has greater substance to mould, but the result is weak and unconvincing. And in his first directorial attempt, Mr. Digges allows matters to advance a little too slowly for comfort. With anyone less than Miss Hitchcock in the pivotal role, the play would fall apart.

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As the friendly tramp, Victor Kilian comes away with princely honors. As the parents, Sally Bates and Ben Smith will have difficulty keeping up with their daughter, even after they've mastered their lines. Harry Gresham plays an interesting drooling derelict in the camp, and Tony Albert a thoroughly objectional one. Frederic Tozere has been the bad bad Nazi for so long, he just couldn't miss. Jo Mielziner's sets are perfection itself. And had Anna Franklin, the colored maid, sung a few more Negro spirituals, the defects of the drama might have been diminished.

"Lily of the Valley"

NEW YORK TIMES, *January 27, 1942*

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Lily of the Valley"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

BEN HECHT is a man of many ideas. In "Lily of the Valley," which was acted at the Windsor last evening, he has written an allegory in the county morgue.

Rounding up a collection of the unnamed dead who are tagged and photographed in the local charnel house, he has brought them to a state of consciousness in a demi-world between earth and heaven and speculated about their destinies.

A romantic writer about the derelicts on the dark fringes of society, Mr. Hecht has invented some picturesque characters; and, since he has the gift of gab, he writes about them with raciness and pungency. To this column "Lily of the Valley" is strange, original and imaginative, dragged up out of the lower depths where a great many interesting things lie; and now and then it is also moving, which is a test of intrinsic veracity. But, for the love of Mike, Mr. Hecht, what are you driving at? Now that it is over, what has been said?

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Although the morgue is a ghostly place it is presided over by a police lieutenant and a photographer, who take a genuine interest in the grim relics of humanity that come their way. Their interest in life is stimulated by the stories of the dead. While they are looking over the photographs of the day's batch of corpses the dead come to a state of half life, enter the room unseen and discuss their past and future. Only one living man can see them and communicate with them. He is a half-mad mission preacher who represents God and to whom some of the ghosts tell their tawdry stories and confess their bewilderment. Eventually he joins their cadaverous society by committing the sin of avarice. In a devout final scene, Mr. Hecht arranges the deliverance of the spirits of the preacher and a hard-headed, honest-minded dock-walloper.

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To say that Mr. Hecht personally arranges the deliverance is to put it deliberately. For Mr. Hecht has such extraordinary command over the style and inventiveness of fiction that he can arrange almost anything. Out of his store of odd information he has drawn some raffish characters who have lived close to the fundamentals. Most of their stories are worn and pathetic. Some of the scenes between them are beautifully written, for Mr. Hecht's sympathies are generous. But writing that seems to have no intellectual foundation can also be maudlin. When Mr. Hecht is writing at random, depending more upon words than thought, he can sound surprisingly hollow. Things become so because he wills them with his vocabulary. And in spite of the vivid things that Mr. Hecht turns up in his reverie, "Lily of the Valley," leaves a final impression of muddle. The loose ends are dyed in bold colors, but they are never tied into a coherent play.

'LILY OF THE VALLEY'

A play in three acts by Ben Hecht; staged by the author; setting and lighting by Harry Horner; presented at the Windsor Theatre on January 26, 1942, by Gilbert Miller. The cast:

Smaley	Edmund Dorsey
Butch	David Kerman
Beitler	Charles Mendick
Andy Miller	Joseph Pevney
Joe	Will Lee
Man	Paul R. Lipson
Lieutenant Balboa	Clay Clement
Bum	John Philliber
Emma Jolonick	Minnie Dupree
Mag	Alison Skipworth
Blackie Gagin	Richard Taber
Frances	Katharine Bard
Shorty	Myron McCormick
Willie (The Miser)	David Hoffman
Annie	Grania O'Malley
Mr. Whittleson	Eugene Keith
Rev. Sven Houseman	Siegfried Rumann
Mike	John Shellie

As his own director, Mr. Hecht has done a competent job that is not vexed with much subtlety. Harry Horner has designed a morgue office of baleful proportions and grisly tone. Some excellent actors are animating Mr. Hecht's words admirably. Myron McCormick is a conspicuously gifted actor. As the militant longshoreman, he is vigorous and sharp-minded. As the crazy mission preacher, Siegfried Rumann gives a splendid performance of rambling, stump-legged good-will. Minnie Dupree turns one brief scene of autobiography into a little gem of acting. As a crack-brained morgue attendant, Will Lee gives a wild and interesting performance. Katharine Bard beautifully acts the part of a sweet-tempered girl. As the Irish mother of the mission, Grania O'Malley plays with intelligence and vitality. Alison Skipworth is acting a brief part as an old prostitute, and Clay Clement makes a good deal out of the role of the police lieutenant who is at once morbid and sagacious.

There is a good deal to keep a theatregoer occupied while Mr. Hecht's morgue incantation is crossing the stage. But he is likely to feel that Mr. Hecht is rambling among the beyond. As a story-teller with the knack of words, he wobbles on the judgement seat.

"Lily of the Valley"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *January 27, 1942*

'Lily of the Valley' Treats of Life and Death in a Morgue

"Lily of the Valley," drama by Ben Hecht. Produced by Gilbert Miller at the Windsor Theatre, New York, Jan. 26, 1942.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

BEN HECHT'S "Lily of the Valley," revealed at the Windsor theatre last night, is easier on the actors than it is on the audience. The actors have their entrances, which are frequently fantastic, and their exits, which are pretty puzzling. But several of them do get a fine chance to act.

The audience, on the other hand, must take its satisfactions out in wondering what the author is really up to.

The play represents Mr. Hecht's adaptation of one of his vivid short stories having to do with the lives and philosophies of submerged humans. These, I believe, have been gathered together in a book called "1001 Nights."

I am familiar only with those chapters I read in Mr. Ingersoll's "PM." These did not include this adventure with the shades of departed derelicts in a county morgue.

The foundation of "Lily of the Valley" is fascinating. A little on the gruesome side, but fascinating.

The superintendent of the morgue is given to speculating on the mystery and meaning of life and death. The official photographer of the institution is convinced the expressions of the dead change with the passing of the spirit.

As the superintendent speculates, his latest collection of cadavers, six who were outcast and beaten, edge their ghostly presences into the room.

Shortly they are followed by a visitation from the living world. The Rev. Sven Houseman, a Bowery missionary, driven from his mission by a fire, calmly takes up quarters for the night in the morgue office.

Later, as he organizes for a meeting, he is able to contact the gathered shades, accepting them as living subjects in need of his spiritual message.

A Bit Mixed

Now the symbolism and the fantasy both become a little difficult for this investigator of the mysteries to follow. One of the derelicts is a miser. The missionary learns that the miser has hidden $40,000.

He covets the wealth and finds it, which symbolically tears the vitals out of the miser who thereupon dies a second death.

Now the missionary would devote his find to the work of the Lord, but is himself shot dead by a mad fellow working in the morgue, who, in turn, is apprehended and starved for the chair.

It may be that Mr. Hecht has, in his own searchings for truth, decided that there is no death; that to cross the border line is only to find both life and the problems of life a continuing mystery.

There are holding scenes in "Lily of the Valley," and inspired bits of acting contributed by Siegfried Rumann as the Rev. Houseman, by Myron McCormick as a tough lad from the Longshoreman's union, by Richard Taber, Minnie Dupree and other shades unidentifiable by name; by Will Lee, and, I think, Joseph Pevney, the photographer.

Good support, too, by Clay Clement, Katharine Bard and Granla O'Malley. An effective set by Harry Horner, and competent direction by Mr. Hecht.

NEW YORK POST, *January 27, 1942*

"Lily of the Valley," Ben Hecht's New Play, at the Windsor

By WILELLA WALDORF

BEN HECHT'S latest play, "Lily of the Valley," produced last night at the Windsor Theatre by Gilbert Miller, of all people, is laid entirely in Police Lieutenant Balboa's office at the New York City morgue. About half of the characters are "stiffs." Derelicts and bums, they are the tragic rubbish swept up every day in a large city, unknown and unclaimed in death.

Mr. Hecht and Mr. Miller must have known that such a work as "Lily of the Valley" will draw only a limited audience to the theatre. Its locale is too depressing, its human misery too unrelieved to set well on the stomachs of many playgoers, especially in days like these, when the major demand is for "escapist" entertainment.

To drama lovers with strong digestions, a feeling for humanity, and a genuine interest in good writing, fine acting and brilliant stage technique, however, we can safely recommend Mr. Hecht's play as an unusual, strangely absorbing and sometimes almost unbearably poignant experience in the theatre.

Anyone who can sit unmoved through the scene in which Minnie Dupree—as the white-haired scrub-woman who arrived at the morgue via a leap from a fifth story window—tells in a few short minutes the story of her miserable life, must be made of granite. And Miss Dupree's few moments in the spotlight represent only one of Mr. Hecht's case histories. Material for his play comes, apparently, from his series of articles on human driftwood written for the newspaper PM.

Preacher in the Morgue

When fire destroys the mission presided over by the Rev. Sven Houseman, a Norwegian sailor turned preacher, reputed in the neighborhood to be harmless but a little mad, he moves his lantern and his funeral parlor chairs, his coffee pot and his Bible, into Lieutenant Balboa's office, and the sympathetic officer lets him stay there for the night. His congregation that evening consists of unclaimed "stiffs" from the slabs downstairs who wander in searching for a way out, and stay to listen to the Rev. Houseman talk about God, and to tell him how they came to be there.

All this may sound like one of those deplorably sentimental, stickily religious dramas that usually end with a miracle, but Mr. Hecht never permits his play to turn mawkish. He is interested not only in the unclaimed dead, but in the policemen who are trying to identify them, and in the staff of the morgue itself. "Lily of the Valley" is full of beautifully etched characters, acted with extraordinary skill under Mr. Hecht's own tingling direction.

There are times when "Lily of the Valley" achieves something of the breath-taking quality of "Outward Bound," but it has neither the variety nor the clarity of that work. Its characters are almost without exception figures of unrelieved misery. Some of them are mad. A murder in the morgue enlivens the final portion of the play, and the murderer is trapped as the curtain falls. But "Lily of the Valley" is not a melodrama. It is the virtuoso work of a dramatist meditating on life and death and God and man, with pity in his heart and a fine disregard for the customary observances in writing for the Broadway audience.

A Superior Cast

The cast is so well chosen that it is difficult to pick out individual performances for comment, but Sigfried Rumann as the Norwegian evangelist, Myron McCormick as the defunct longshoreman who proposes to organize the "stiffs" into a union to negotiate with God, Clay Clement as the understanding police lieutenant, Joseph Pevney as an artistic photographer of the dead, Will Lee as a mad fellow who washes corpses, and the above-mentioned Minnie Dupree, Katharine Bard, Alison Skipworth, John Philliber, Richard Taber and David Hoffman as the unclaimed are all excellent.

Finally, Harry Horner's cavernous setting with its eerily lighted window provides the proper atmospheric background for Mr. Hecht's interesting, if somewhat gruesome, drama.

"Lily of the Valley"

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *January 27, 1942*

'Lily of the Valley' Opens at Windsor

Supernatural Fantasy by Ben Hecht Has County Morgue for Its Setting

By JOHN ANDERSON

THOUGH Ben Hecht and Charlie MacArthur have written some fancy fun together they are not so good at separate desks for Mr. Hecht followed Mr. MacArthur's recent failure with a solo drama at the Windsor last night, when Gilbert Miller presented a fantasy of the living and the dead called "Lily of the Valley."

The less reverent members of the audience had already dubbed it a collaboration by Hecht and Macabre. I found it an uneven and unhappy mixture of deep feeling and shallow thinking, of emotions beyond words and words beyond belief. I can only salute it as a brave attempt to unscrew, as Mr. Morley used to put it, the inscrutable.

Mr. Hecht is a man of wide sympathy and compassion and he has tackled a subject plainly close to his heart—to make out of it an affirmation of faith. This is a high enterprise for any playwright to undertake but it is peculiarly risky in the theatre where values are distorted unless they are handled skillfully. It is only part of Mr. Hecht's trouble that his dead seem more alive than the living.

For the worst of it is that he has attached a melodramatic plot to his supernatural fantasy, and brought his imagination to earth when its place is beyond the heavens. His invention lacks both the delicacy and spiritual feeling to give it the glow of true fervor. He writes about the dead without quite writing about death.

For his locale he goes to the easiest and most natural premises—the County Morgue where six or seven unidentified and unclaimed dead await their anonymous burial. The scene is the office of the morgue. The police officer in charge has some strange feeling about his charges. The official photographer suspects presences that elude his camera. On a snowy night a wild water-front preacher starts to hold a meeting in the morgue without knowing that the dim figures on the dingy benches are the souls of the unwanted derelicts.

By far the best part of the play is the second act wherein the broken ruins of human beings stand before the old preacher, thinking him a messenger of God, and tell him their secrets. It is there that Mr. Hecht uses with full power his most humane and vivid gift, and recreates with sympathy and tenderness the tattered lives these people have left.

The sketches in a sort of self-confession are done with touching simplicity. To the tragic disclosure that they are still looking for God is added the preacher's terrified discovery that he is speaking with the dead, but the mute eloquence of this dilemma is suddenly destroyed by a banal plot wherein the preacher finds the dead miser's hidden money and is shot by a morgue attendant.

Concertina Miracle

The third act finishes the quick descent from the sublime to the ridiculous. The preacher reproaches himself for coveting gold, and with a belligerent youth (who might have been another Liliom if Mr. Hecht had clung to his subject) he hears his battered concertina playing a hymn with unseen hands, while it is suddenly illuminated by a heavenly light.

As a testament of faith it is on the level of the ending of "Peter Pan" and measures neatly the distance between the human heart and theatrical hokum. After spending an evening in the morgue in quest of God I felt, somehow, that a baby spotlight and a trick accordion fell a little short of the goal. As a man of faith and certainly a man of words Mr. Hecht should have lifted our spirits instead of a bag of tricks.

Though Mr. Miller has given it a handsome production in an atmospheric but not too mortuarial setting by Harry Horner the author's own direction seems too indulgent and uncertain.

While the minor characters are admirably drawn and well acted the play lacks a theme structure and a coherent viewpoint. The old preacher emerges as the central character but he is by no means clearly written and Siegfried Rumann's performance only adds to the confusion.

It is not dominant or forceful enough, nor does it suggest the spiritual quality which Mr. Hecht plainly intended. Minnie Dupree contributes a heartbreaking sketch of a suicide in one of the play's best passages and there is excellent work by Myron McCormick, David Hoffman, Richard Taber, John Phillliber, Clay Clement and Alison Skipworth.

Mr. Hecht, with superb intentions, has given them and us only the ghost of a show.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *January 27, 1942*

Hecht's Lily of the Valley Is Presented at Windsor

By FRANK FARRELL

The drama editor bats for John Mason Brown, on lecture tour.

IF BEN HECHT will send his message via Postal, Western Union or flat-foot floogie, this department will be only too glad to stand the charges and make over an edition in the interest of art, letters and the unfortunate customers subjected to the premiere of Lily of the Valley at the Windsor Theater last night.

No doubt, Playwright Hecht has a message in his new play, but the communication system which has served so admirably in bringing us the complicated lines of the Greeks, Shakespeare and Maxwell Anderson, apparently is inadequate for the high-flying Charles MacArthur's erstwhile co-pilot. Or, perhaps, vice versa. At any rate, whatever the author intended to say in Lily of the Valley is garbled beyond repair, or even curiosity. And the net result of this evening in the theatre is a parade of stiffs, doing a lot of talking in the county morgue but getting nowhere.

It's a morbid excursion into fantasy in which Mr. Hecht brings the day's seven deceased derelicts back to life in the file room of the county icebox. Then, through the medium of a Bowery missionary, he leads several of them to God. And he achieves the ultimate in 1942 theatre by delving into a realm beyond the Great Beyond when he kills a miser a second time by relieving him of his money in Purgatory.

As a former police reporter who has made his tours of the Bellevue slabs, I'll hail the wonderfully realistic set and illumination of Harry Horner. And I'll go along with Mr. Hecht in feeling that the police officer in charge at the morgue should be a man like the play's Lieut. Balboa, an intelligent, conscientious public servant whose whole life is devoted to the search for names for the cadavers brought to him daily. But that's as far as I'll go. For when Mr. Hecht begins to observe the souls of the departed, the Lily of the Valley starts smelling like hokum.

Into Lieut. Balboa's office they troupe, these seven shabby spirits of corpses that defy identification. A dead bum, a scrubwoman, a young girl who died as the result of another's attempt to commit suicide, a prostitute, a union delegate, a tubercular escaped convict and a miserly beggar who died of hunger and cold, leaving $40,000 in a little box on a roof-top.

Simultaneously a Bowery mission burns down and the conductor of it, the Rev. Sven Houseman, a peg-legged seaman turned preacher, moves what trappings he saved into the vast wastes of Lieut. Balboa's dismal office. The kind police officer permits him to hold his services there that night. And Houseman proceeds, unmindful that his congregation, invisible to others, are seven people out of this world—in more ways than one.

Each gets up and tells his wretched story. The preacher suddenly realizes he is seeing the dead. He helps three into heaven, but something halts the procession. Three of the remaining flounderers point a finger at the miser and tell the preacher where he hid the $40,000. With the confused purpose of building a temple in which he can pray for the redemption of the rest, the preacher hastens to retrieve the money, but is waylaid and murdered by a crased morgue attendant.

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In most amateurish stride, Playwright Hecht proceeds to bring the criminal to justice, but staggers blindly in his attempt to dispose of the soul of the preacher and the remaining wraiths.

It is evident that he knows what a morgue looks and feels like. It is clear that he can describe a character with definition and eloquence. He loves a union man, and gets in a feeble dig at Hitler.

Siegfried Rumann gives a fair account of himself as the preacher, but the high-spot of the evening's acting was the performance of Minnie Dupree in the role of the demented scrubwoman who lost her husband and three children before she followed a vision out a top-floor window to eternity. Katharine Bard is as nice as you please, playing the bewildered little girl. In fact, all the actors were excellent. It's too bad they didn't have a play.